

Seattle City Council

**Public Safety, Government Relations, and Arts Committee Meeting**

Friday, 2:00 PM, February 17, 2006

**Words' Worth**

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Jeannette Allée**

Today's poet is **Lyn Coffin**

**Lyn Coffin** is recipient of an NEA grant, winner of the International Poetry Review award for translation, and her work has appeared in the Best American Short Stories. Currently, she teaches through the Seattle Arts & Lectures' Writers in Schools program and performs with EffectiveArts. Her seventh book, *Crystals of the Unforeseen*, is available from the Elliott Bay Bookstore.

**Last night, I dreamed about Aunt Percy**

by Lyn Coffin

my spunky alcoholic aunt, who I so  
loved for being who she was, funny and flawed.  
Leaving a bar one night when she was young,  
she rammed her car into a backroad bridge  
abutment, then made her way in heels  
to the closest farm and called the police,  
complaining that someone had moved the bridge.  
Aunt Percy, old, was in a reception line  
and I went up to her: she offered me  
apricots in a clear glass bowl: sweet, wet,  
delicious. Aunt Percy, I said, you look  
wonderful. And she did. But *thin*, she said,  
and it wasn't good. She meant her skin,  
how stretched it was, how open to attack.

A question came up: someone in the family  
needed immediate help. “Don’t worry,”

I said, which is almost always a mistake.  
“Barb and Laurie will work it out.” I meant  
one of them would solve the problem, but Aunt  
Percy darkened, and I knew I’d angered her.  
When I woke up, I understood. My cousin  
Barb and her daughter are alive, and  
Aunt Percy’s dead. She died, as so many have  
this past year, without my knowing. I think  
dream-talking with the dead may be a sign  
my own death is not far off, and there’s  
not much time left for me to tell it like  
I think it is, which is the farthest  
honesty can take us while we breathe. And  
in the dream, I spoke to my father, and  
was glad to see him looking well. The last  
real time was in a Scottsdale hospital:  
I went in as soon as the nurses were done  
with bathing and shaving and feeding him.  
Garbled as he was, he got out my name and  
rumbled something about “feet” and “cold.”  
I rubbed his feet till he signaled me to stop,  
left a picture of my mother by his bed,  
and walked back to his nearby empty house,

meaning to return after lunch. I was  
hardly in the door when the hospital called...  
In the dream, my father was standing in

the reception line: he looked happy and  
healthy. I said I was glad to see him. Then,  
speaking from someplace deeper than memory,  
I said, "You're my father, among other things."  
When I woke up, I knew my suspicions  
had been accurate: my father's uncontained  
and contaminate love was like a ship and  
the ship wrecked and went down and wood floated  
to the shore of the island of my life,  
and I picked up all the wood I could and  
used it for fires when the nights were cold.  
Now I'm awake, a day older, aware:  
it does not matter when we die what we had,  
only what we did. Whether you know it  
or not, some of you are, like me, so close to  
the edge, your feet are beginning to get cold.  
Your dead, like mine, have formed a reception line  
and we all need immediate help.

-- end --